

The Use of Political Cartoons to Encourage Homefront Participation During WWII

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Grade Level: 8+ (can be adapted for 5th)

Abstract:

- This lesson seeks to encourage students to look at posters from WWII and examine their content with the intent of placing the propaganda document (mostly posters) on a social behavior continuum (attached). This continuum was developed from the Hate/Violence Pyramid presented at the Summer Institute, but with the idea these documents also ask for positive and affirming behaviors as well as negative and destructive behaviors. This activity's end goal is to allow students to see how "propaganda" manipulates our emotions to achieve a desired goal—either to aid in the war effort or provide the emotional justification for the killing that occurs in war.
- This activity can also be used to help students understand why people would risk their lives to save Jewish people during the holocaust and risk their lives in war.
- It could also be extended to the killing of Civil Rights workers during the 1950's and 1960's. It can explain how segregationists were successful for such a long period of time and understand how difficult it was to undo the years of stereotyping and prejudice they had perpetuated.

Essential Question(s)/Enduring Understandings:

- How can we understand moments in history by examining graphic documents of the era?
- How do the images make us feel towards the subject of the documents?
- Can these documents and their analysis help us understand why they might have been created and what behaviors they encouraged from those who saw them?
- Do these documents lead to behaviors that might be seen as unacceptable?

Assessment:

- Given a WWII propaganda document, students will explain whether that document was intended to elicit positive or negative feelings and actions from the viewer and defend where that student would place it on the curriculum.
- Students can describe how that document would make one want to aid in the war effort.
- Students can identify specific images meant to marginalize the enemy.

Previous lessons necessary:

- Analysis of political cartoons
- Introduction of the terms "caricature" and "stereotype"
- Introduce the use of derogatory names: "Jap", "Kraut", "Nip", etc. Relate to current ones if needed: (i.e. "nigger", "spic", etc.)

Materials:

- A copy of the social behavior continuum.
- Copy of the book: *Posters of World Wars I and II*
- Assortment of propaganda documents from the following web sites:
<http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-posters/jap.htm>
<http://www3.eou.edu/hist06/WWIIPropaganda.html>
http://web.uccs.edu/history/student%20presentations/heidi/world_war_two.htm
<http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-posters/nazi.htm>
http://www.wwii-collectibles.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=WOC&Category_Code=jpp
<http://www.psywarrior.com/JapanPSYOPWW2.html>

From Documents from The Illinois State Archive 1941-1945: Illustration in Document #4

Procedure:

- Put students in groups of 3 or 4
- Pass out the continuum and discuss its relevance to various situations, for example:
The famous statement about they came for _____ and I was silent . . .
Jim Crow laws
Ethnic jokes
Civil Rights slayings of the 1960's
The burning of African-American churches
Whites joining the Civil Rights Movement
Other examples
- Have groups find where these would go on the continuum and justify their placement
- Check for understanding categorizations of the continuum
- If understanding is adequate, continue on; if not, use more examples
- Use a balanced selection (as much as possible) of documents from several of the combatant nations of WWII
- Give students a selection of three or four documents (Use a balanced selection [as much as possible] of posters from several of the combatant nations of WWII) and analyze the posters, deciding how they were designed to appeal to their target audience
- Place the posters on the continuum and justify their placement
- Have groups share out their posters and their thinking
- Have students do a "quick write" to decide whether there were significant differences between how the combatant nations presented their war aims and the war aims of enemy nations to their citizenry
- Share and discuss the "quick writes"

Enrichment/Additional:

- Read and respond to the article at: <http://www.msu.edu/~navarro6/srop.html>
- Question to write about: Is it necessary to dehumanize the enemy in order to make it easier for soldiers to kill them in combat?
- Extended lesson: How would students analyze Bill Mauldin's cartoons?

Resources:

- *Posters of World Wars I and II*
- *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*
- Documents from The Illinois State Archive 1941-1945
- Scholastic: *World War II Primary Sources Teaching Kit*: Pages 38-39
- Scholastic: *World War II Primary Sources Teaching Kit*: Page 33 Bill Mauldin cartoons